



RRTC-EBP VR

Rehabilitation Research & Training Center
for Evidence Based Practice in Vocational Rehabilitation



Research Summary

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Bridging the Gap: A Comparative Assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Practices with Transition-Age Youth

Background

Transition from school to work or post-secondary education is often challenging for youth with disabilities. Research has shown that youth with disabilities have lower high school graduation and employment rates than youth without disabilities. The majority of youth with disabilities have traditionally received transition services from schools. However, youth participation in these programs varies widely, as do the services offered and the availability of promising programs. The services provided by schools are not available to youth who leave high school or who are ineligible for services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Support services for adults may be difficult to access by youth due to a lack of coordination between the school and adult service providers, and the varied eligibility requirements of providers.

State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies are in a unique position to help youth transition from school to work. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) requires that state VR agencies coordinate with their state's education agency to outline their respective roles in planning and delivering services to students with disabilities. As a result, VR agencies can provide interventions through attendance at individualized education plan (IEP) meetings and facilitate entry into job training programs. Youth may have access to VR services such as specialized training, soft skill development, and financing and other supports for postsecondary education. VR agencies may also be able to develop plans and provide services to help youth achieve competitive, paid employment.

The Study

This study explored varying characteristics of VR agency practices related to serving youth with disabilities. A select group of eight agencies were examined: five whose statistics for serving youth with disabilities were relatively high and three whose statistics were relatively low. Five areas of practice, each reflecting how the agency operates internally and coordinates with other state, local, and federal programs, were examined:

1. Organization and collaboration strategies
2. Outreach, application, and eligibility
3. Service delivery
4. Employment
5. Monitoring and evaluation

This information may assist RSA and state VR agencies identify promising practices to serve transition-age youth with disabilities.



Results

Several similarities were observed in how all agencies identified and provided services to youth with disabilities, including having dedicated staff to serve youth, counselors assigned to work in specific schools, and processes for in-school work. They used multiple, creative outreach efforts to engage schools and in-school youth and developed youth-specific programs, often in collaboration with community partners. Most recognized their inability to serve all youth who qualify for education services under IDEA or Section 504. Fifteen characteristics were identified as associated with agencies with higher statistics for serving youth:

Organization and Collaboration

1. State organization placement in education departments
2. State leadership with transition responsibilities
3. More stakeholder collaborations

Outreach, Application, and Eligibility Processes

4. Outreach plans and activities that target parents
5. Outreach plans and activities for out-of-school youth
6. Targeting younger students for transition services
7. Above-median scores for applicants ages 16-24 who applied by age 18
8. Above-median scores for applicants ages 16-19 with an individualized education plan
9. Above-median scores for proportion of case closures accounted for by transition-age youth

Service Delivery

10. Intensive, school-based programs
11. Connecting youth to post-secondary education
12. Internal benefits counseling

Employment

13. Supporting employment programs other than Project SEARCH

Monitoring and Evaluation

14. Varied performance benchmarks for counselors
15. Monitoring of youth-specific programs

Bottom Line

Fifteen practices were identified that may help agencies better assist youth bridge the gap between school and work or post-secondary education. A combination of factors reflecting an agency's and community's commitment to serving youth may be most helpful, rather than the use of one or another specific practice.

Learn More

Read the full article here:

- Honeycutt T., Bardos, M., & McLeod, S. (2015). Bridging the gap: A comparative assessment of vocational rehabilitation agency practices with transition-age youth. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 43, 229-247.

Read additional articles and plain language summaries to learn more about this topic:

- [VR Practices and Youth RRTC](#)
- [Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation - Volume 41, issue 2](#)
- [Multiple Case Studies on Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Service Delivery Practices](#)
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